

## [Personal Reaction to Politics]

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"Living Lore" Series

Francis Donovan, Thomaston, Connecticut

January 7, 1939 PERSONAL REACTION TO POLITICS, CURRENT EVENTS.

Mr. MacCurrie, having returned from his walk to find no one in the fire house, sits down to a game of solitaire, and he greets me from his corner table as I enter. Solitaire has become a part of his daily routine. During the past month his few remaining cronies have

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one by one dropped from the "active list" of the afternoon sessions, so that he finds himself either alone these days, or in the company of one or two of the younger members whose conversation runs to lighter matters than obviously regards as immature. I watch his game in silence until it becomes plain that the cards are against him. He gathers them together carefully and lays them aside.

"Do I ever win?" he repeats. "Sure I win, once in a while. Just often enough to keep me interested in the game.

"Did you see the paper today? See where they subpoenaed all those Connecticut men in that McKesson-Robbins case. What did I tell you the other day--wherever you find something crooked going on there's bound to be a politician or two mixed up in it. Look at that MacKenzie. He was into that goddam Merritt Parkway scandal and mixed up in the Waterbury case, and now this.

"I hear some of the lads around here sayin' they're goin' to try to get in to see that Waterbury trial. They might just as well save time and stay home, they'll not get in.

"Some of them went doon there this afternoon to see them 2 demonstrate that new aerial ladder the Waterbury fire department got. They take an interest in new equipment you know, these lads here are on their toes, all the time.

"How long have I belonged to the department? Oh, I don't know, I'm just an honorary member now, you know. Honorary members have the privileges of the place, but they can't vote at meetin's and the like o' that. I belonged as an active member about sixteen years. Then I left to go to work in Waterbury. When I come back, they made me an honorary member.

"It gives me a place to hang out. I don't like to stay around the house on account of the kids. They make too much noise. So I go home about five o'clock and have me supper and then I come doon here and listen to the radio till about eight and then I go home, and

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maybe read in my room for a while and then go to bed. I live a pretty regular life. That's why I'm healthy.

"You hear about Henry? The doctor told him to take it easy. Not to come doon town so often. He's not confined til the house, you understand, but they told him not to climb the hill so much."

Mr. Coburn enters, hangs hat and coat on a hook. Says he:

"Looks like the ladies in the big house across the street are giving a party."

"Mr. MacCurrie: "That's about all they ever do give --parties."

Mr. Coburn: "Right you are Andrew. We ought to have a few more around here like Miss Kenea. If all the rich people were like her this wouldn't be a bad world to live in."

Mr. MacCurrie: "How much do you think she's worth."

Mr. Coburn: "I don't know. They say six or seven million.

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And who'll get it when she goes I wonder. Prob'ly leave it to some charity."

Mr. MacCurrie: "Well, she's done a lot a good here in town."

Mr. Coburn: "Yes, and she's helped out plenty of people that never even said so much as thanks for it. Look at those young punks she sent through school. Do you think they appreciate it? Two or three of them didn't even finish. Got thrown out. She's a wonderful woman, all right, but she's had hard luck with some of her prospects.

Mr. MacCurrie: "Well, a couple of them turned oot good, too, don't forget."

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Mr. Coburn: "Yeah. All I meant was, some take advantage of her. She's a sucker for a hard luck story. I know a lad, here a few years ago, he got himself head over heels in debt. He was married and had a couple of kids, but he was makin' good money, and times were good. There wasn't any excuse for it. He got a car he couldn't pay for, and he borrowed money here and borrowed money there, and before long he was about five hundred bucks in the red.

"So what does he do but go down to her house and give her a long story about his creditors pressin' him for the dough and he didn't know where to get it, and it was drivin' him crazy. He says if she'd let him have it, he'd pay back every cent with interest. That was pure bunk, he knew she wouldn't take him up on it.

"Well, he guessed right. She not only gave him the money, but she told him to forget all about it, she didn't want it back. All she did was warn him to be more careful in the future and try to stay out of debt."

Mr. MacCurrie: "Yes, she's a fine woman, a fine woman. There's families here in town that have practically been supported by her, one time or another."

Mr. Coburn: "If all the rich people were like her, the Socialists and the Communists wouldn't have an argument in the world."

Mr. MacCurrie: "I see where Gross is givin' the Socialist credit for his defeat."

Mr. Coburn: "You don't mean the Socialists, Andrew, you mean McLevy."

Mr. MacCurrie: "That's right. McLevy."

Mr. Coburn: "Well, Baldwin has got one chance. After all they don't want to forget that it wasn't the will of the majority that put him in there. They'll be watchin' every move he

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makes. And if he don't do things just right, Mr. McLevy will go sailin' in two years from now."

Mr. MacCurrie: "He'll most likely go in anyhow, to my way o' thinkin'. He's gettin' stronger every year. Who'd ever thought he'd get over five hundred votes in this town?"

Mr. Coburn: "Yeah, people figure different these days than they used to. They don't stick to parties any more. It's the issue that counts. Or the man. A guy like McLevy can build himself up. It takes him years to do it, but finally he gets some place.

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They say he used to be around the city of Bridgeport with a soap box, speakin' for the Socialists. Then the big parties got so rotten down there he just stepped in and made the most of it. People were so disgusted with double machine politics, they decided to give him a chance. And look what he did down there. Cleaned up the city, reduced taxes . . ."

Mr. MacCurrie: "He can stay in as mayor for the rest of his life if he wants to."

Mr. Coburn: "He don't want to. He wants to go higher. And he will, you mark my words, he will."